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- Difficulty in passing urine.

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ORCHID
60 Gray’s Inn Road, London WC1X 8AQ
nurse@orchid-cancer.org.uk
www.orchid-cancer.org.uk
Registered in England with the Charity Commission No.1087540.
Company registered in England No. 3963360
Penile Cancer; What you need to know: such as CT and MRI (see Orchid’s main booklet) can help identify the body that may have been affected by penile cancer. This information sheet describes a possible treatment. Orchid is dedicated to supporting men with a diagnosis of penile cancer. This information sheet describes a possible treatment.

Radiotherapy (localised penile cancer)

Radiotherapy is the use of high-energy x-rays to kill cancer cells and can be directed at cancer from outside of the body (external beam radiotherapy) or from within the body (brachytherapy). Both types of radiotherapy can be used to treat penile cancer which is confined to the penis as an alternative to surgery.

External beam radiotherapy

External beam radiotherapy can also sometimes be used to treat other areas of the body that may have been affected by penile cancer. Before both of these types of radiotherapy are performed the area to be treated will be thoroughly identified by performing scans such as CT and MRI (see Orchid’s main booklet Penile Cancer: What you need to know) and ink marks applied to the target treatment area.

Men will need to be circumcised (the foreskin surgically removed) prior to radiotherapy to reduce the chance of skin swelling and irritation which may affect the penis as a result of treatment.

Brachytherapy

This type of treatment can be used to treat penile cancer which is not greater than 4cm in size and can be performed using two possible methods.

Under a general anaesthetic, radioactive needles are positioned through the penis and small radioactive pellets inserted near to the cancerous areas. The needles will need to stay in place for up to 7 days and men will have to stay in hospital during this time in a room with limited mobility (bed rest). Children and pregnant women will not be allowed to visit them.

The needles and the catheter will be removed under a general anaesthetic once all the treatments has been given.

To protect the passage of urine from the bladder a urinary catheter will be inserted. (see Catheters section on the next page).

Palliative radiotherapy

A special plastic mould is made in the shape of the penis. This can be fitted over the penis and small radioactive wires attached to the penile tissue around the cancerous area. Radiation can then be administered through the wires. This type of treatment can be performed on a daily basis over several days.

External beam radiotherapy

This treatment involves radiation being beamed at cancer by an external machine. Treatment tends to be given over a six week period in short doses (10-15 minutes). Beams of radiation are directed at the cancer and the dose of radiotherapy given is controlled by a computer.

Side effects related to radiotherapy treatment

Fatigue

This may be caused by a combination of both treatment and travel. Getting small restful naps or taking a mild sedative medication may help.

Skin reactions

Radiotherapy can irritate the sensitive skin around the penis and the blood supply to the penis may be reduced. These symptoms tend to occur 2-3 weeks from starting external beam radiotherapy and 2-3 weeks after brachytherapy.

Vitamin E supplements and topical creams can help the healing process and these may be prescribed by the healthcare team. It is also advisable to keep areas that have been exposed to radiotherapy covered and protected from direct sunlight.

Problems passing urine

Radiotherapy can sometimes cause the tissue of the penis to become thicker and this can sometimes cause a narrowing or ‘stricture’ of the urethra and cause the urinary stream to spray.

If this occurs, a minor operation can sometimes be performed to widen the urethra.

Men can also be taught how to widen the urethra using specially designed plastic tubes (urethral dilatation).

There are also several types of disposable urinary funnel which can be purchased (see diagram below). Examples of these can be found on: amazon.co.uk. Similar non-disposable devices are available on prescription and men should ask their GP or Practice nurse for details of these.

Sometimes this ability will slowly return as the tissue has become thicker or less healthy men may sometimes be taught how to widen the urethra. If this occurs, a minor operation can sometimes perform the operation.

Erection problems

If the blood supply to the penis is reduced as a result of radiotherapy or the tissue has become thicker or less healthy men may find it more difficult to obtain an erection. Sometimes this ability will slowly return as the body heals.

There are several types of treatment that can help men obtain an erection and men should ask their healthcare team about them if they prescribe any toiletries which may cause skin irritation and delay the healing process.

Catheters

A catheter is a plastic tube that drains urine from the bladder. It will be connected to a leg drainage bag which can be left in place for up to a week. A bigger bag can be attached to the leg bag for drainage at night.

The catheter is held inside the bladder by a small balloon that is inflated with sterile water following insertion. It will therefore not usually come out unless properly removed by deflating the balloon. The balloon tends to rest over a sensitive area of nerves in the bladder which may be affected by its presence and these nerves are connected to nerves in the penile area. This irritation may make a man feel as if he needs to pass urine urgently and sometimes force a small amount of urine from around the catheter. Using a strap or tape to fix the join of the catheter to the thigh may sometimes make the irritation less severe. Men should clean around the penis as instructed by the specialist team and should avoid any toiletries which may cause skin irritation and delay the healing process.

Urine flows down catheter

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Balloons

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Penile Cancer: What you need to know

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Problems passing urine

Radiotherapy can sometimes cause the tissue of the penis to become thicker and this can sometimes cause a narrowing or ‘stricture’ of the urethra and cause the urinary stream to spray.

If this occurs, a minor operation can sometimes be performed to widen the urethra.

Side effects related to radiotherapy

Fatigue

This may be caused by a combination of both treatment and travel. Getting small restful naps or taking a mild sedative medication may help.

Skin reactions

Radiotherapy can irritate the sensitive skin around the penis and the blood supply to the penis may be reduced. These symptoms tend to occur 2-3 weeks from starting external beam radiotherapy and 2-3 weeks after brachytherapy.

Irregularities of the urethra

It is essential to keep the urethra clean and to use antibiotic cream or an antiseptic solution to prevent infection. The catheter should not be pulled or tugged.

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Prescription and men should ask their GP or Practice nurse for details of these.

It is also possible to purchase a special key (RADAR Key) which allows anyone with a medical condition which has affected their urinary pattern to make use of otherwise locked or inaccessible toilets in the UK. It can be ordered from Disability Rights for a small fee. (see diagram below).

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Men should clean around the penis as instructed by the specialist team and should avoid any toiletries which may cause skin irritation and delay the healing process.

The catheter should not be pulled or tugged.

It is very important to drink 2 - 3 litres of fluid daily to flush the urine through and water based drinks tend to prevent bacteria forming which will help prevent urinary infection.

When emptying or connecting catheter bags, hands should always be washed thoroughly with soap and water before and after the procedure.

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How a catheter works

**Urine flows down catheter**

- **Bladder**
- **Prostate**
- **Urethra**

**Practice**

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For further information on life after treatment, please refer to Orchid’s main booklet: Penile Cancer; What you need to know.

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